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SUBJECT: BRAZIL ANNOUNCES LOWEST RATE OF DEFORESTATION OF AMAZON
FOREST EVER RECORDED

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. On November 12, Brazilian Environment Minister Carlos Minc announced Brazil's lowest ever Amazon deforestation rate since monitoring began in 1988. A total of 7,008 square kilometers of forest were cleared, which represents a 45 percent drop from the previous annual period. On the next day, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva rolled out Brazil's position to be presented at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009. The heart of the Brazilian position is an 80 percent reduction in the rate of deforestation of the Amazon forest by 2020 compared with the 1990-2005 average. END SUMMARY

LOWEST EVER DEFORESTATION RATE

12. (SBU) During an event at the Presidential office on November 12, Environment Minister Carlos Minc announced Brazil's deforestation rate for the 2008/2009 period. The 7,008 square kilometers (or 2,705 square miles) of Amazon forest that was cleared is the lowest quantity since the Government of Brazil (GOB) started monitoring deforestation in the region in 1988. President Lula and the Head of the President's Office, Minister Dilma Rousseff, both of whom are going to Copenhagen, were present at the announcement.

13. (SBU) "The new deforestation data represents an extraordinary and significant reduction for Brazil", President Lula commented during the event. Indeed the number represents a 45 percent decline when compared to the previous 2007/2008 period. Another positive aspect is that all, except one, of the 36 municipalities with the highest deforestation rates last year reduced their rate of clearing this year. The GOB had concentrated its law enforcement efforts on these 36 municipalities. The Brazilian National Space Research Institute (INPE), which provided the analysis, noted that the current numbers are estimates and have a standard error of plus or minus 10 percent and that their final report for the 2008/2009 year will be released in March 2010. The two states with the most deforestation were again Para and Mato Grosso with 3,687 and 1,047 square kilometers clearing and these numbers represent a 35 percent and a 68 percent drop for both states respectively.

14. (SBU) Minister Minc claimed that the GOB's law enforcement

actions and other efforts were responsible for 90 percent of this year's reduction. Environment NGO community celebrated the decrease, though they pointed out that even though police efforts against illegal clearing has definitely improved, other factors were involved. Most notably, there has been a decline in agriculture prices for beef and soy, which when high are considered major drivers behind deforestation.

REDUCING AMAZON DEFORESTATION BY 80% BY 2020

15. (SBU) On the next day, President Lula announced Brazil's position to be presented at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen. The country's target refers to cuts in its economy-wide emissions in the magnitude of 36.1 percent to 38.9 percent by the year 2020. See REFTEL. At the core of the Brazilian position, which envisions a total reduction of greenhouse gas emissions of up to 1.052 billion tons in 2020, is an 80 percent drop in the rate of deforestation of the Amazon forest by 2020 compared with the 1990-2005 average (19,500 square kilometers). Such reduced deforestation would lower Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions by 564 million tons per year or about 53 percent of the goal. The GOB plans to incorporate this objective in its domestic National Climate Change Plan. That plan must go to the Senate for approval.

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THE CERRADO

16. (SBU) While the lion's share of Brazil's cuts in emissions are supposed to come from reducing deforestation in the Amazon, the second most important emission reduction measure is lowering the deforestation rate in the Cerrado by 40 percent by 2020. This measure would reduce emissions by 104 million tons per year. The Cerrado Biome covers parts of the center-west, southeast, north and northeast parts of Brazil. It covers a total of 2 million square kilometers (NOTE: The Amazon Forest covers 3.6 million square kilometers and approximately 20 percent of it, or 700,000 square kilometers, has been brought down. END NOTE) and approximately 39 percent of this area has already been deforested. The average deforestation area for the last five years in the biome has been about 22,000 square kilometers, which represents three times more than the current deforestation area for the Amazon.

17. (SBU) Unlike the Amazon, there are no specific programs or policies to protect the Cerrado, which means that Brazil is essentially starting the protection of the biome from scratch. Moreover, recent independent studies and researches have concluded that the emissions from deforestation in the Cerrado may soon be several times greater than those of the Amazon.

18. COMMENT. The latest Amazon deforestation numbers were lower than what the GOB had expected. Brazilian officials had been working with a 9,000 square kilometers estimate for this time period. The GOB deserves credit for making a major contribution to this reduction through its various law enforcement and protection measures. These results come at a good time because they help give the GOB confidence that it can achieve the ambitious emissions reductions it plans to put on the table in Copenhagen. END COMMENT

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